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A Low Key Affair: German Parties' TV Advertising in the 2004 European Election Campaign

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Lynda Lee Kaid and Bruce Gronbeck
General Editors

Vol. 10



PETER LANG

New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
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The EU Expansion

Communicating Shared Sovereignty in the Parliamentary Elections

EDITED BY
Lynda Lee Kaid



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5. A Low-Key Affair: German Parties' TV Advertising

FRANK ESSER, CHRISTINA HOLTZ-BACHA, AND EVA-MARIA LESSINGER

In addition to posters, television ads are among those media that guarantee parties high visibility during election campaigns. Visibility is essential, particularly for smaller parties, which usually lack the capacity to generate the attention of the media and therefore must fight a media barrier. Posters and ads, however, make the parties independent of the selection criteria of the media. Therefore, posters and ads seem to be the campaign instruments that are indispensable during European election campaigns, in which parties in general invest less than for campaigns on other levels. Both are low-cost media but nevertheless provide for overall presence during the campaign. This effect is of major importance for European elections, since these are regarded as second-order elections and as such have difficulties arousing the interest of the voters. In fact, the 2004 *Eurobarometer* postelection survey showed that voters mostly do not actively search for information during the election campaign. Instead, they remain passive and come into contact with the campaign only where it cannot be avoided. Thus, voters are exposed to the campaign during their habitual media use or through obtrusive campaign media such as posters and television ads. In 2004, television and radio proved to be the most important campaign channels: 9 out of 10 respondents in the *Eurobarometer* survey said that they had seen or heard something about the campaign in the broadcast media. Television ads were almost equally successful: 80% of the respondents reported that they had seen ads by parties or candidates on television. Information behavior, as it is reflected in these findings, was similar throughout the 25 European Union (EU) member states. Voters from the new member states did not behave very differently from those who had voted before in a European election (European Commission, 2004).

Although television ads broadcast during European election campaigns at least prove to be effective in being noticed by voters, they have not received as much research interest as television ads produced for national parliamentary election campaigns. However, a study done during the European election

campaign in 1989 (Holtz-Bacha, 1990) demonstrated that the party ads did not have effects “only at the waterworks,” as was assumed earlier. Instead, the findings showed that voters who had watched ads found it easier to assess the campaign than those who had not been confronted with party advertising on television. Thus, viewers appeared to have learned something that allowed them to judge the campaign. In addition, watching the ads correlated with a positive attitude toward the European Community and with an improvement in opinions about the Community and the European Parliament (EP). Because such variables can influence the motivation to turn out in the election and the voting decision, an indirect effect of the ads can be assumed that seems to be mediated by pre-existing attitudes of the voters. These findings confirm what other studies on the role of party advertising during election campaigns have suggested: if there is an effect of the ads, it does not so much appear as a direct influence on the decision for or against a specific party; rather, the voting decision is affected in an indirect way through an influence of the ads on other variables such as attitudes toward issues or candidates (see the overview in Holtz-Bacha, 2001, pp. 86–89).

The Ad Campaign in 2004

In Germany, advertising on radio and television during European election campaigns operates under the same regulations as advertising for parliamentary elections. Although political advertising is generally prohibited in the broadcasting media, electoral ads are allowed during the run-up phase of a campaign. Before the European election campaign in 2004, ads were shown during the last four weeks of the campaign. Basic data for the ad campaign on television indicate the weak commitment of the parties. First, the ad campaign was almost completely confined to the public broadcasting channels, which are obliged to make free time available for the parties' electoral advertising. Only the big parties, the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Christian Democrats (CDU and CSU), bought additional broadcast time on the commercial television channels. In addition, most parties did produce no more than one spot for free airing on television. They had their only advertisement repeated in all the slots they were allotted. Nevertheless, none of the 24 parties running for election missed its chance to broadcast advertising on television. All parties were represented on the public service channels ARD and ZDF. Since it is established practice that each party receives a minimum of two slots per channel to present itself to the electorate, even the smaller parties were represented at least four times on television with their advertising.

In Germany, broadcast time is given to parties according to the principle of graded allocation that is laid down in the Party Law. Bigger parties

receive more time (slots) than smaller parties. The number of slots that are finally allotted is calculated on the basis of a party's strength in earlier elections and at the time of the campaign or of the chances of a party in the upcoming election. It is the general rule that the smaller parties represented in the body to be elected have to receive at least half the number of the slots that the big parties get. Groups and parties not represented in the respective parliament receive half as many but must be represented at least twice to ensure a certain repetition effect. This regulation has led to the 8:4:2 rule, with a maximum of eight slots going to the big parties, the CDU and the SPD, four to the four smaller parliamentary parties, and two slots to all the others. For the European election campaign in 2004, only the CDU received eight slots per public channel. The SPD was restricted to seven because the party's performance in the polls was relatively weak at that time.

On public channels, it is left to chance which time slot goes to which party. Thus, parties are not able to control whether their ad is placed during prime time or reaches a specific target group. Only the placement of ads on commercial channels allows for precise targeting. However, if the number of viewers who watch an ad is taken as an indicator for success, the audience reach of the individual ads of the European election campaign shows that placement in middle prime time—somewhere between 8:30 and 9 p.m.—was best. During this time, individual ads of different parties reached more than 5 million viewers (over the age of 14 years), with market shares of almost 20%.

The fact that the two big parties produced just one spot each to be broadcast on public television, which therefore ran 14 or 16 times, respectively, can be interpreted as indicating either weak commitment by the parties or that both parties did not want to invest much money in this particular campaign channel. Both explanations have some plausibility. From the perspective of the parties, European elections are secondary elections. Therefore, they prefer to save their funds for—in their view—more important elections in which the distribution of power is at stake. In addition, the national election of 2002 had already indicated some signs of a waning interest of the big parties in television advertising. The campaign managers complained about the conditions for advertising on television, whereby electoral ads are tediously announced, and inserts over the whole length of the spot tell viewers that what they see is party advertising. These precautions may act as a warning and damage the surprise effect that advertisers count on (Lessinger, Moke, & Holtz-Bacha, 2003, p. 217).

In addition to the airtime they received for free on the two public television channels, the SPD and the CDU (and its sister party, the CSU) purchased time on several commercial channels. The disadvantage of having to pay for advertising time is balanced by the ability to select the channel and the program environment for their ads and thus to address either a big

audience or a specific target group. However, only the big and therefore financially stronger parties can afford to purchase advertising time on television, whereas the others are restricted to the free time slots they get on public television. During the 2004 European election campaign, not all parties represented in the national parliament or the EP chose to spend money for advertising time on commercial television.

Although 24 parties ran for election, only 27 different spots were broadcast during the European election campaign. The SPD, CDU, and CSU were the only parties that produced two ads for their advertising campaign on television. But even these two spots per party were different only in terms of their length: the ads produced for public television were simply shown in a shorter version on commercial television. Whereas the allocated time slots on public television were 90 seconds, the ads shown on commercial television were much shorter. The SPD cut their ad down to 45 seconds, and the CDU and CSU used versions of their spots that did not even come up to 30 seconds. Again these findings show that spots become shorter when campaigners have to pay for broadcast time (Holtz-Bacha, 2001, p. 158). On the other hand, using shorter ads for commercial television, which allows the parties to determine the conditions for their advertising themselves, may also mean that parties prefer shorter ads, whatever the circumstances.

Remarkably, the two major parties used similar concepts for their ads. In their broadcasts, the CDU and the SPD presented "typical" representatives of different groups of the population, from young people to seniors. These people appeared with short political statements or, in the case of the CDU, were associated with different political positions by a speaker off camera. Associating ordinary citizens with party positions has been a popular format for electoral ads over time. As in commercial advertising, testimonials by citizens suggest closeness to the people and help to keep the production costs low. However, it was more unusual that both parties devoted their complete ads to this testimonial format. Only the SPD spot changed its format at the end, when Chancellor Gerhard Schröder spoke into the camera. The concentration of the two big parties on the low-cost format can be seen as another indicator that the SPD and the CDU regarded the European elections as second-order elections and deemed the ads less relevant.

The SPD and the CDU also used similar strategies to raise the aesthetic value of their ads. Testimonials usually try to enhance their authenticity by simulating interviews on the street. The European election ads instead used professional actors in artificial environments. The CDU ad showed smooth actors portraying common characters in front of a beige curtain on a meagerly decorated stage. As in a purist documentary, the black-and-white SPD spot compiled close-ups of talking heads that rotated around their own axis while speaking.

The spots of the SPD and the CDU were also quite similar in the issues they mentioned. Both parties publicized secure pensions, education, and innovations as preconditions for economic growth, and the compatibility of motherhood with a job for women. In addition, the SPD spot dealt with values such as justice and peace, and the CDU broadcast attacked the government. Neither the SPD nor the CDU focused on European issues, and both mentioned Europe only in commonplace statements. The CDU claimed that "Germany has to play in the first league in Europe again," and in the SPD spot Chancellor Gerhard Schröder stressed his efforts to make Europe "a fair peace power."

In comparison, the spots of the smaller parties, the Greens and the Free Democrats (FDP), were much more imaginative. The Greens used a hybrid format of modernity and tradition to package their message for the European election: on the one hand, the ad used almost no words. Instead, the pictures were cut against the rhythm of a pop song with the English title "Don't Touch Me Tomato," which dominated the ad without being interrupted by any statements. This made the ad resemble the modern format of a video clip. On the other hand, the composition of the pictures followed the traditional format of a montage of individual visual impressions. The ad showed a series of landscape pictures, everyday scenes, and political symbols that were sporadically commented upon by humorous pantomimes of Green politicians. The visual leitmotif of the ad was the color green. The "speechless" video clip with its symbolic images of growing grass, nuclear plants, and pictures showing the outline of Europe could easily be understood internationally and thus fitted with the all-European campaign of the Greens. The German Greens were one of 25 Green parties that joined together in the Eurogreens, which was founded in the spring of 2004 and became the only pan-European party alliance. Nevertheless, the Green ad did not convey much about Europe in particular. Among the different motifs of the spot, short humorous portrayals of prominent Green politicians popped up, ending with a shot on the party's two top candidates for the EP, Rebecca Harms and Daniel Cohn-Bendit.

The FDP focused their poster campaign almost exclusively on their top candidate, Silvana Koch-Mehrin. In the FDP ad on television, however, she could be seen only briefly after the actual "feature film," which was a humorous and grotesque story ironically portraying German bureaucracy. The plot showed a likable and shy young man who wanted to open a restaurant or a snack bar or just to find employment as a cook but was constantly rejected by the "authorities" in a rude and monosyllabic manner. The humor of the ad stemmed mainly from the visual hyperbole of every detail: the dire, dusty, and messy office with its creaking door resembled the atmosphere of film noir of the 1940s. Behind an old and massive desk, which stood on a kind of platform, lurked two whimsical figures: a corpulent

public official who worked up a sweat while sharpening countless pencils and an elderly governess with a pointed nose who used a magnifying glass to check the applicant out. The continuous change between a bird's-eye and a worm's-eye view satirized the power structure visually: practically and cinematically, the applicant is at the mercy of the strict "supervision" of the public authorities. However, there was no reference to the European election in the whole film, neither in the plot nor in the following statement by the Koch-Mehrin—unless the EU should be made responsible for the bureaucracy that is caricatured in the ad.

Content Analysis of the Ads

The length of ads to be broadcast on public television is fixed. Variation in the average length of all ads shown during an election campaign is therefore dependent on the number of ads that are produced for commercial television, because these are usually shorter. The average length of all ads shown during the 2004 European election campaign was just under 80 seconds. This is close to the predetermined length of the ads that ran on public television (90 seconds), because only three parties produced additional ads for broadcasting on commercial channels. In general, the findings confirm a trend that emerged in the previous national election campaigns: the ads are increasingly characterized by a fast pace with short cuts and shots. On average, the ads were interrupted by 20 cuts, which indicates a downright hectic presentation.

Inspired by earlier content analyses (Holtz-Bacha, 1999, 2001), this study did not use the entire ad as the unit of analysis. Instead, coding was done on the basis of spot sequences or scenes (for a more extensive description of the method, see Holtz-Bacha, 2001). A term adopted from film theory, a "sequence" in a spot is defined as a unit containing one or multiple takes (separated by cuts or superimpositions) that constitute a continuum connected to a unit by several criteria. These criteria refer either to the content (e.g., a continuum of location, time, action, the constellation of actors, or the topic) or to the formal features (e.g., a continuum of noise, music, or speaker). A sequence changes if the content and/or formal brackets change and another action and/or constellation of figures and/or topic and/or formal features dominate. One sequence is always separated from another sequence through a cut or a superimposition. Thus, the identification of the coding unit refers primarily to the visual side of the ads and also takes into account that presentational formats often change within one spot.

The 27 different spots that were broadcast during the European election campaign on public or commercial television comprised 119 sequences. On average, a single ad consisted of four sequences or combined four different presentation formats, respectively. Since the average length of the individual

ad was approximately 80 seconds, this indicates a frequent change of the format within one ad. These findings also support splitting the ads into smaller coding units because each change of the format also signifies a change in the verbal and visual meaning.

During the European election campaign in 2004, the parties relied mainly on traditional formats of political advertising. The most popular format was the montage (30%), followed by statements (22%). The montage was primarily used for the presentation of issues (which could also be a candidate if he or she was made the topic of the ad), often combined with emotional pictures of landscapes or people. Statements are the classical format for spots in which a candidate appears and speaks directly into camera, often without any elaborate environment. Statements are low-cost productions and are therefore popular with smaller parties. However, even the parties that are better-off financially make their top candidates speak into the camera at least in some sequences and preferably at the end of the ads. In addition to these two formats, only pack shots were used frequently (25%). Pack shots usually show the logo or the name of the party that is responsible for the ad. They are mostly inserted at the end of an ad to remind viewers of the party that produced the ad.

Special effects were rarely used in 2004. Again, this can be regarded as an indicator of the parsimony that characterized the ads of the 2004 European election campaign. More than half of the sequences did not show any special effects. Among the special effects that were used, computer animation appeared most frequently (15%). Computer animations were introduced with technical developments in the 1990s, giving the parties new, less expensive production techniques. Although music has evolved as an essential and seemingly necessary element of electoral ads in general, it was present in only 50% of the European election ads.

Since the first direct election to the EP in 1979, parties have been accused of declaring the European election a test for the national election and an opportunity to campaign on national, instead of European, issues. In 2004, the CDU explicitly appealed to voters to settle accounts with the red-green government (Dillenburger, Holtz-Bacha, & Lessinger, 2005). This study used several indicators to ascertain whether the parties presented themselves as more European or more national. References to Europe could be made either by using European symbols (for instance, the European flag or the European anthem), through a European perspective on issues, or by presenting European issues or candidates.

The fact that 10 new member states joined the EU only shortly before the election, the ongoing discussion about the possibility of Turkey accessioning the EU, and the signing of the European constitution provided genuine European issues that could have been made the subject of the European election campaign. However, findings from the analysis of television ads give

another picture and show that the 2004 campaign was not very European. The topics most frequently addressed in the party ads were general or specific appeals to the voters either to cast their vote at all or to vote for a specific party. These appeals refer to the election or the election date and thus have a vaguely European angle, but they are not necessarily accompanied with the discussion of (other) European matters. Also on top of the list of issues that were dealt with in the ads was social policy, which here includes the issue of jobs and any policy for the job market. This findings also indicate that internal (national) affairs dominated the campaigns of the parties.

European perspectives on the issues discussed in the ads were rare. A completely European angle on issues was found in only 20% of the ad sequences. Almost the same percentage addressed issues with a perspective that combined the European and the national angle. The specifically European issues that were discussed in the ads were distributed over a wide range of political fields, from bureaucracy and the financing of the EU to the relevance of the European election in general. Thus, any real focus of the European debate could not be identified.

There are several reasons why personalization can scarcely be expected in European election campaigns (Wiorkowski & Holtz-Bacha, 2005). In 2004, however, the parties nominated top candidates for the election to whom they could thus refer in their political advertising. Overall, at less than 30%, the analysis furnished a low personalization rate in general. Therefore, the European top candidates did not play an important role. They were present in less than 7% of the sequences and in only 4% were they the topic of the ad. Other party representatives did not appear more often; if they appeared at all, their presence was limited to the visuals. Contrary to expectations, party advertising on television was not dominated by top national politicians, which may also be an explanation for the weak presence of the European candidates. Instead, the findings for 2004 confirm that European election campaigns are not very personalized and rather focus on political issues without associating them with individual politicians.

European symbols, which can be used to give the campaign a European touch, were also rarely present in the television ads. Only 15% of the ad sequences showed such symbols as the European star ring, the European flag, or the EU colors. The use of European symbols must be regarded as particularly weak considering the fact that approximately 10% of the sequences displayed the German flag or the German national colors.

Overall, these findings indicate that the German parties did little to conduct a European campaign, to emphasize the relevance of the election, and to make their European candidates known by the electorate. The ads rather served the national party competition after the opposition parties had called on the voters to teach the governing parties a lesson and thus

provoked the argument over national issues. Against this backdrop, the ads dutifully paid tribute to Europe through symbolic references but not by launching European issues or presenting their candidates.

Effect Analysis of the Ads

European elections usually generate less voter participation than do national elections. The younger generation is a group of particular concern. As shown by the *Eurobarometer* postelection survey, in 2004 more than two-thirds (67%) of the 18- to 24-year-old population did not turn out for the European election. This figure placed the number of nonvoters within this age group at approximately 13% above the average (European Commission, 2004). This prompted an investigation of the extent to which the CDU, SPD, FDP, and Green election ad campaigns had the ability to mobilize and persuade young German voters.

The sample in this study consisted of 40 young voters (50% female), two-thirds of whom were younger than 25 years of age (median age: 23). The participants were students pursuing various courses of study at the University of Mainz (humanities, social sciences, economics, and natural sciences). Students studying political science and communications were consciously excluded, as these students were expected to display an unusually high sensitivity to the topic under investigation. The investigation was performed two days before the European election in a series of small group meetings in which respondents were exposed to spots from the 2004 campaign and answered questions about their reactions. Owing to the large number of factors tested, each testing routine required 40 minutes. For two-thirds (66%) of the participants it was their first European election, although most (91%) had taken part in the national Bundestag elections of 2002. With regard to general party affiliation, 35% declared a preference for the center-right camp (consisting of the CDU and FDP), 50% preferred the center-left camp (the SPD and the Greens), and 15% stated no party preference.

Awareness and involvement are preconditions for political communication effects (McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 2002). Although an elevated awareness of the parties' European election campaigns was a given for the participants in this study, they did lack involvement. The young people interviewed gained their awareness of the election primarily through political advertising: 95% cited election posters, 72% TV news, and 69% TV spots as important sources of information. Thus, campaign advertising was in first and third places, accentuating its great importance to young voters. Other channels through which young voters gained an awareness of the EU election were newspaper articles (51%), newspaper ads (44%), flyers and pamphlets (41%), and radio news (36%). Compared with the large significance

of media-transmitted information, only 8% mentioned any direct contact with politicians. However, it is true that the young people felt that their concerns were scarcely addressed by the campaigns. Although 48% described themselves as having a strong or very strong interest in politics, only 15% reported a strong or very strong interest in European politics, and only 17% reported a strong or very strong interest in the European election. This lack of involvement led to only 13% of the young voters interviewed feeling that they were well or very well informed about the EU two days before the vote. Bearing this background in mind, the goal of this study was to answer four research questions:

- RQ1: To what extent did the political TV ads lead to changes in attitudes toward the parties and toward Europe?
- RQ2: To what extent did the political TV ads lead to changes in willingness to participate in politics?
- RQ3: To what extent did the campaign advertising spots lead to changes in the amount of knowledge participants had regarding the parties' platforms and key issues?
- RQ4: Upon which factors was the positive evaluation of a spot ad dependent: the issues addressed, the formal presentation, or the recipient's party preference?

The study harks back to preliminary studies by Lynda Lee Kaid and Christina Holtz-Bacha (Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 1995). It can best be described as a one-group design with repeated measurement and no control group. We are also grateful to Jürgen and Michaela Maier for their willingness to share their measuring instrument with us. They examined the effects of political TV spots on an older sample of EU voters (see chapter 6 in this volume) and developed a standardized questionnaire.

Effects on Attitudes

When considering the potential effects of campaign advertising, its contribution to opinion change and attitude change are the first things that come to mind. However, Lazarsfeld's pioneer study *The People's Choice* (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944) found little to indicate that political advertising messages cause substantial changes in opinion. American political campaign consultants maintain that a TV spot must be viewed at least 7, and ideally between 10 and 15, times to have a lasting effect on the audience (West, 2005). Such high (and expensive) contact intensity can scarcely be achieved in Germany given the restrictions in terms of election regulations and party finance laws. It is not uncommon for a German voter to see only two or three spots through the entire election campaign. Correspondingly, our investigative design did not focus on ad blitzes or

clutters. This also means, however, that one could not expect great attitudinal changes as a result of a single contact with an advertising spot.

This assumption was confirmed as the ads did not generate any alteration on voting intention ("What party will you vote for?"). The stability of voting intention ("How sure are you about your vote for this party?"), measured on a scale of 0–100, also remained static. There were also no changes in party evaluation ("What is your assessment of the [party]?"). After viewing the spots, the young voters gave all parties poorer evaluations than during the pretest. Although the changes (measured on a scale of 0–11) were uniform, they were not statistically significant.

More substantial opinion changes were seen regarding important European issues. The young voters gave Germany's membership in the EU a significantly more negative assessment after having viewed the spots. When asked, "How do you assess Germany's membership in the EU?," their responses became significantly more negative, moving from 4.24 to 4.03 (on a five-point scale; $t = 2.24$; $p < .05$). The reason for this may be sought in the quality of the spots, which, in the estimation of the young voters, were not particularly flattering to the German parties. Clearly, for these voters the German parties' contributions appeared incongruous with their own ideal vision for Europe. Their positive basic attitude toward Europe was revealed in the fact that their opinions regarding other important European issues became more positive after they had been exposed to the ads. After reviewing the EU campaign spots they showed greater support for the European unification process ("Do you favor further European integration?") and a greater satisfaction with the state of democracy in the EU ("How satisfied are you with the state of democracy in the EU?"). Again, this trend is uniform but not statistically significant. Therefore, the first research question yielded mixed results: no alterations in attitude regarding political parties, slight changes in attitudes regarding Europe.

Effects on Mobilization and Participation

An important normative democratic expectation placed on political parties is that they should inspire young voters to participate in the political process. Negative or aggressive advertising spots can lead to political disenchantment and voter turnout; positive and persuasive spots can awaken voter interest, activate party members, and mobilize the undecided (West, 2005). The German parties scarcely accomplished the latter during the European election, however. The spots examined had no significant effect either on the likelihood of voting ("How likely are you to vote in the European parliament election of June 13?") or on the level of interest in European politics ("How interested are you in European politics?"), or on the campaign itself ("How interested are you in the EP election campaign?").

The spots could also not stem the widespread tendency toward political disenchantment. Indeed, this was even slightly exacerbated: the young voters agreed with the statement "Politicians care about ordinary people" even less often after viewing the ads than during the pretest. The spots seemed to cultivate apathy especially strongly among the small group of "nonpolitical" individuals, operationalized as those who had mentioned no party affiliation when asked. They displayed much higher levels of apathy in their post-test scores than the sample average. The second research question must be answered with the statement that the campaign advertising spots did not engender any impulse toward an increased willingness to participate.

Cognitive Learning Effects

The third research question considered whether the spots caused an increase in knowledge and whether the young voters learned something about the parties' platforms and key issues. Advancements in learning are linked to the memory components of recollection (reproduction) and retention (storage). In advertising effects research these are measured using the indicators of recognition and recall. To measure recognition, each time they had viewed a spot the young voters were presented with a list of statements. They were asked to mark whether the statements had actually been made during the spot. Here, the Greens' spot performed the most poorly. Two-thirds of those questioned (67.5%) mistakenly marked that the spot advertised "for more green throughout all of Germany," when the slogan actually stated, "for more green throughout all of Europe." Although there were smaller errors in recognition for all the parties' spots, none showed such a significant disparity. However, it is true that the spot had not been designed for retention. As documented in the content analysis, it consisted almost exclusively of emotionally laden pictures and humorous clips accompanied with background music, the whole of which suggested political issues in vague terms but did not connect them with concrete statements.

Owing to the minimal issue orientation, young voters also had a difficult time concretely naming the primary issues of the Greens' image spots. To measure recollection, each time they had viewed a spot the interviewees were asked to write down all the topics they had retained on a blank sheet of paper (free, unaided recall). The open-ended statements made regarding the Greens' spot were the least precise. In a post hoc effort to categorize these, we classified the bulk of them as supporting "General Environmentalism: More Green," followed by "Energy and the Environment: Against Nuclear Power," "An Optimistic Green Outlook on Life," and "Nutrition and the Environment: Against Gen-Food" (Table 5.1). The strong focus on a single issue (environmentalism) without linkage to

concrete statements differentiated the Greens' spot from all the others. The most similar spot was that of the FDP. The FDP, too, used humor, but the spot was more specific in its message (communicated in large part through the final statement made by their chief candidate, Silvana Koch-Mehrin). On the basis of the young voters' perceptions, the FDP spot could be summarized in a few points: "a reduction of bureaucracy" will allow "more opportunities and freedoms for dedicated individuals" and can "lower unemployment and help secure jobs" (Table 5.1).

The CDU and SPD spots caused the greatest amount of issue learning to take place (see percentage points in Table 5.1). The determining question now becomes which party best addressed the interviewees' concerns and problems with its campaign issues. The young voters were therefore asked to list their most pressing concerns regarding Germany and Europe. The answers revealed that the young voters' own European issues (Table 5.2) were scarcely addressed by the parties' spots. The content analysis had already established that European issues were largely ignored in the 2004 election—and that is precisely how the interviewees perceived it. No party dealt appropriately with their agenda of European political problems. None addressed the "economic adjustment problems with the EU expansion in Germany and the new member countries" or the lack of consensus in the "foreign and security policies or the EU constitution" or "terrorism, domestic security" or "subsidies" or the "lack of democracy and transparency in the EU" (compare Tables 5.1 and 5.2).

Instead, all the parties focused strongly on issues relating to domestic politics. To measure the capacity to address voters' preferences effectively, we calculated rank-order correlations between the respondents' own German issues (Table 5.2) and the issue priorities in the spots as perceived by the interviewees (Table 5.1). Such comparisons between voter agenda and party agenda allow inferences to be made regarding party responsiveness. According to this analysis, the CDU spot was the most successful in addressing the young voters' issue agenda ($\rho = .714$, $p = .071$). Of course, agenda-setting theory would also allow for an opposing interpretation of these findings: the CDU spot had the strongest agenda-setting effect on the young voters' perceptions of domestic problems. In contrast, the agenda of the Greens' spot showed the least similarity to the young voters' issue agenda ($\rho = .182$, $p = .696$).

Effects on Spot Evaluation

In terms of the fourth research question, these results raise the expectation that the Greens' spot would receive the poorest evaluation. We held this expectation because during the pretest the young voters had told us that the

Table 5.1 Issue Agendas in German Party Ads As Recognized by Respondents

CDU spot	SPD spot	FDP spot	Green spot
1. Social security net for young and old (pension, health care) 93%	1. Social security net for young and old (pension, health care) 90%	1. Reduce bureaucracy 59%	1. General environmentalism: more green 61%
2. Lower unemployment, help secure jobs 90%	2. Peace (in Europe) 71%	2. More opportunities and freedoms for dedicated individuals 59%	2. Energy and the environment: against nuclear power 58%
3. Support the economy 58%	3. Support and reform the education system 68%	3. Lower unemployment, help secure jobs 56%	3. An optimistic green outlook on life 53%
4. Cut and simplify taxes 53%	4. Justice 45%	4. Support the economy 10%	4. Nutrition and the environment: against GM food 22%
5. Critique of the SPD/Green government coalition 45%	5. Support families (child and job) 42%	5. Justice 5%	5. Europe 17%
6. Support and reform the education system 43%	6. Support the economy 32%	6. —	6. Support and reform the education system 14%
Based on 170 topic mentions by 40 respondents	Based on 158 topic mentions by 40 respondents	Based on 79 topic mentions by 40 respondents	Based on 93 topic mentions by 40 respondents

Notes: Question: "What are the most important issues that you believe were mentioned in the ad?" Unaided recall, multiple responses permitted. Table lists the six most frequently mentioned issues for each spot.

political parties' platforms and their key issues were very relevant to their decision on how to vote. When interviewees were asked the question "How do the following aspects influence your voting decision?," the "political parties' platforms" and "issues in European politics" were valued most highly (4.2 on a seven-point scale), followed by "general positive feelings about a party"

Table 5.2 Personal Issue Agendas of German Respondents

Personal German issue agenda	Personal European issue agenda
1. Lower unemployment, help secure jobs 88%	1. Economic adjustment problems with the EU expansion in Germany and the new member countries 76%
2. Support the economy 72%	2. Joint foreign and security policies, joint EU constitution 54%
3. Social security net for young and old (pension, health care) 70%	3. Support the economy 49%
4. Support and reform the education system 43%	4. Lower unemployment, help secure jobs 27%
5. Environmentalism 20%	5. Environmentalism 19%
	5. Terrorism, domestic security 19%
	5. Subsidies 19%
6. Cut and simplify taxes 18%	6. Lack of democracy and transparency in the EU 14%
Based on 161 topic mentions by 40 respondents	Based on 127 topic mentions by 40 respondents

Notes: Question: "If you think of German domestic policy, what are most important problems facing the country in your view?" "And with regard to Europe? What are most important problems facing the European Union in your view?" Unaided recall, multiple responses permitted. Table lists the six most frequently mentioned issues.

(3.6) and "issues in domestic politics" (3.2). However, our initial expectation did not materialize: in fact, the Greens' spot received the best and the CDU spot the worst evaluations in the post-tests. In response to the question "How well did you like the spot overall?," the Greens' spot achieved the highest value (3.7), and the CDU spot ranked lowest (2.7) on a five-point scale (Table 5.3). Even though the CDU addressed many of the young people's own issue priorities (as shown earlier), the form of their presentation actually alienated many of them. It was perceived as attacking, not very plausible, not very persuasive, not very hopeful, and not very constructive with regard to proposed solutions (Table 5.3). Thus, this spot received a significantly poorer assessment than the SPD spot, which young voters felt was more friendly, more factual, more informative, and more Europe-oriented. As the "cumulative evaluation of the spot's presentational style" in Table 5.3 shows, the Greens' spot received the best grades by far. The Greens' and the FDP spots were perceived as creative, funny, and stimulating, but owing to the Green spot's cheerfully ironic communicative imagery it made the additional impression on the young people of being constructive and convincing.

Table 5.3 Product Image: Familiarity, Likeability, and Evaluation of the German Spots

	Perception of the CDU spot	Perception of the SPD spot	Perception of the FDP spot	Perception of the Green spots	Test of significance
<i>Familiarity of spot</i>					
Have you seen this spot on TV before? (% answering yes)	55	46	33	5	Chi ² = 20.06; df = 3; $p < .001$
<i>Likeability of spot</i>					
How well did you like the spot overall? (Scale: 1, not at all, to 5, very well)	2.73 ^a	3.10 ^a	3.60 ^b	3.68 ^b	F = 8.42; $p < .001$
<i>Detailed evaluation of spot</i>					
We would like to know from you how you liked individual attributes of the ad. How much do you agree with the following statements? (Scale: 1, don't agree at all, to 5, fully agree). The ad . . .					
. . . was convincing	2.25 ^a	2.78 ^b	2.50 ^{ab}	2.68 ^{ab}	F = 2.99; $p = .034$
. . . proposed constructive solutions to problems	1.18 ^a	1.95 ^b	1.85 ^b	2.08 ^{fb}	F = 9.64; $p < .001$

. . . made me hopeful	1.75 ^a	2.50 ^b	2.25 ^b	2.32 ^b	F = 5.48; $p = .001$
. . . was persuasive	1.98 ^a	2.53 ^b	2.40 ^{ab}	2.60 ^b	F = 3.42; $p = .002$
. . . did not attack the political opponent	1.78 ^a	4.88 ^b	3.90 ^c	3.23 ^d	F = 73.05; $p < .001$
. . . was informative	2.13 ^a	2.60 ^b	2.08 ^a	2.08 ^a	F = 4.43; $p = .001$
. . . was Europe-oriented	1.68 ^a	2.85 ^b	1.70 ^a	2.12 ^a	F = 15.01; $p < .001$
. . . was factual	2.32 ^a	3.02 ^b	2.00 ^a	2.03 ^a	F = 15.73; $p < .001$
. . . was friendly (not aggressive)	3.82 ^a	4.76 ^b	3.24 ^c	4.45 ^b	F = 22.85; $p < .001$
. . . was stimulating (not boring)	2.78 ^a	3.10 ^a	4.35 ^b	4.18 ^b	F = 30.25; $p < .001$
. . . was funny	1.58 ^a	2.03 ^a	4.24 ^b	3.92 ^b	F = 70.62; $p < .001$
. . . was creative	2.18 ^a	2.18 ^a	3.85 ^b	3.95 ^b	F = 47.02; $p < .001$
<i>Cumulative evaluation of spot's presentational style</i>					
Overall mean of all individual attributes (1 indicates overall very bad spot; 5 indicates overall very good spot)	2.13 ^a	2.94 ^b	2.84 ^b	2.98 ^b	F = 28.93; $p < .001$

N = 40 respondents; data gathered two days prior to the polling day; tests of significance based on ANOVAs for identical groups. Means with different superscripts (a, b) in the same row differ statistically on the 5% to 1% level according to Bonferroni tests.

The fourth research question asked what the main factors were upon which the positive evaluation of a spot depended. Did it depend on the issues addressed, the formal presentation, or personal party preference? The findings indicate that the young people received the issue-laden, statement-oriented CDU and SPD spots more poorly than the picture-laden, ironically playful FDP and Green spots. It was interesting to note that the CDU spot received the significantly poorest evaluation even though its issue profile demonstrably addressed and influenced what the young people viewed as problems. However, three other criteria superseded this evaluation. First, party preference: correlation analyses between "party evaluation" and a judgment regarding the "likability of the spot" showed that the CDU spot was highly evaluated only by young CDU voters, whereas the Greens' spot was received very positively by Green voters as well as other voters (especially SPD voters). Second, the CDU spot's inability to win supporters beyond its base voters was underscored by an examination of the presentation factor. Correlation analyses between the "overall evaluation of the spot's presentational style" and a judgment regarding the "likability of the spot" revealed that the CDU spot addressed only its own camp well. Third, "familiarity with the spot" came into play as a compounding element. Interestingly enough, the fact that the young people had already seen the CDU spot seemed to detract from it, whereas the Greens' spot profited by being new to almost everyone. According to the correlation analyses, familiarity with the CDU spot led to a more negative evaluation, whereas unfamiliarity with the Greens' spot led to a rather more positive assessment.

Summary and Conclusions

Young voters name political advertising as an important source of campaign information. However, since the broadcasting of TV ads is subject to stringent restrictions in Germany, one can expect only a minimal level of influence on opinions, attitudes, participation, cognition, and evaluations. For many citizens, a one-time contact with a party's television spot during a European election is not unusual. Our findings show that one can expect only a minor impact in such cases. This is especially true for young voters, who were the focus of this effects study. As we had expected, the spots did not lead to changes in political party stance. However, the CDU, SPD, FDP, and Green spots also did not succeed in generating enthusiasm for the European election among young voters, nor did the spots increase the young voters' willingness to vote or diminish their latent political disenchantment.

Most important, the spots did not address those issues in European politics that were of burning interest to the young people themselves: economic adjustment problems with the EU expansion in Germany and the new

Eastern European member countries, the lack of consensus regarding foreign and security policies, terrorism/defense, and the EU constitution itself, questionable subsidizing policies, and the lack of democracy and transparency in the EU. These are relevant and urgent issues that none of the spots addressed. The parties' decisions to focus largely on domestic political issues instead caused them to miss the young peoples' stated interests. Ultimately, it is true that the profile of issues does not seem to have had any great significance in the evaluation of the spots (and, thus, the evaluation of the parties' product images). Instead, party preference and the style of the presentation prevailed. The FDP spot's comedy style and the Green spot's music video style resonated with the young voters particularly well. However, the Greens' spot alone succeeded in winning sympathizers beyond its own voting base. Whether this can be of consequence in an election decision could not be determined, yet it may prove to be an important prerequisite.

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6. The Reception of European Election Campaigns and Political Involvement

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The main goal of election campaigns is to influence the political attitudes and the electoral behavior of voters. In this context, one of the most important tools of parties and candidates is political advertising through media channels. Among the different ways of advertising, the broadcasting of campaign spots on television is a key strategy. This is true not only for national election campaigns but also for European elections, which were first held in 1979 and have been subsequently held at five-year intervals.

In Germany, one of the founding member states of the European Union (EU), the rules for airing campaign ads are based on state broadcasting and media laws and decisions of the Federal Constitutional Court. The rules are the same for national, state, and European elections but are different for public and private TV stations (for an overview, see Holtz-Bacha, 2000, pp. 63–78). For all political parties participating in an election, the public stations (ARD and ZDF) must provide an appropriate opportunity to televise campaign spots. To do so, ARD and ZDF offer broadcasting time for free. How much time each party is allocated depends on its size (Hesse, 1994; Holtz-Bacha, 2000). In the 2004 European Parliament (EP) election, the two major political parties, the governing Social Democrats (SPD) and the biggest party of the opposition, the Christian Democrats (CDU), were allocated 14 and 16 spots, respectively, in total (7 and 8, respectively, on each station). Other parties represented in the national parliament were allowed to broadcast eight ads. Smaller parties not represented in the Bundestag could televise four spots. Because the spots do not appear within blocks of regular commercials but are broadcast immediately before or after newscasts or during early evening entertainment programs, they usually draw a large audience that consists also of politically indifferent citizens (Holtz-Bacha, 2000, pp. 59–60). Private TV stations, too, must provide broadcasting time. But in contrast to public TV slots, the parties have to pay for the ads (Holtz-Bacha, 2000,